Lifetime of Service, Love War & a Suitcase

Three Wars from the Sky

By Adair Olney

BILL EUGENE MYERS

June 1, 1919 - November 15, 2018

Adventure and service have filled the lives of many, but few lives can match the action-packed life of Bill Myers. From a ranch up in the Rocky Mountains, to the war-torn skies above France, Korea, and Vietnam, to Saudi Arabia and back to Colorado, Myers lived a life that was nothing short of extraordinary. Beloved family and friends who treasured the veteran are the ones who continue his legacy to this day.

Bill Eugene Myers was born on June 1, 1919, in Raton, New Mexico.[1] His primary home for most of his entire life was his grandfather's ranch in Buffalo Creek, Colorado.[2] Due to his father's career in civil engineering, Bill and his family picked up and traveled to Venezuela, a country he would call home for part of his childhood.[3] However, his father passed away at a young age, while Bill was still a young boy himself; this traumatic event sent the remaining members of the family back to the United States, to his grandfather's ranch in Buffalo Creek, Colorado.[4]

Bill experienced adventure from a young age, having spent his childhood on the western ranch filled with bronc busting and cow punching, activities not part of any average childhood.[5] It was not long before his interest in the military sent Bill across the country to the Randolph-Macon Military Academy in Front Royal, VA. In a 2010 interview with a fellow veteran and journalist, Bill says he enjoyed the "highly-structured lifestyle" at the Academy although he admitted "it was tough."[6]

After he graduated from the academy in 1938, Bill returned to Colorado where he then joined the Colorado Army National Guard in Golden.[7] Ever the hard-worker, he also enrolled in the Colorado School of Mines in 1938, balancing education with his duties in

Myers took each obstacle in his stride and continued to prove himself a man of service.

Myers made the decision to drop out of college after two years, after failing Chemistry and deciding he was broke.[9] In a 2010 interview, Bill recalled that after he dropped out of the Colorado School of Mines, he moved to northern Idaho where he worked in a mine. There he recovered his student debt in six short months.[10] Luckily, Myers was able to return to the Colorado Army National Guard, this time at Camp George in Golden, Colorado, the Guard's only permanent training facility.[11]

The year 1941 saw Bill and his unit activated for duty; they first traveled to Camp Forest, Tennessee where the news of Pearl Harbor sent waves of shock and panic through the United States.[12] Immediately, Myers' regiment was sent to California, first to Camp Roberts in San Miguel California, and then farther north to Camp McQuaid in Monterrey, California. Bill became enthralled with the experience of flying and he soon made a decision that would change his life: he filled out an application for flight school so he could be a part of the U.S Army Air Corps.[13] In 1943, after flight training at Luke Army Air Field, outside of Phoenix, Bill's hard work had paid off and he was granted his wings as a single-engine fighter pilot.[14] And so began a 35-year long passionate career flying planes for the U.S military.

After completing advanced fighter training, Bill joined other patriotic men and women in the fight against the Axis powers in the Second World War. His hard work in training to be a fighter pilot paid off when he was sent over to Europe to defend his country.[15] Bill Myers fought with the 511th Fighter Squad (FS), 405th Fighter Group (FG), 9th AF in France. The Werhmacht and Luftwaffe were no match against Bill Myers and his favorite plane, the P-47 Thunderbolt.[16] While the war raged on in Western Europe, 24-year-old Bill fought bravely from the sky, conducting missions such as dive-bombing ground targets.[17] During a 2010 interview of his time in World War II, Bill fondly remembers how he and the pilots in his unit would celebrate: "In those days you were supposed to get a shot of whiskey after every mission," Myers said. "We did that the first couple days and then realized that was a waste of whiskey. What good's one shot of whiskey? So we started saving our shots for one big party."[18]

Of the 147 missions Bill completed in World War II, the most recognizable one is his participation in the Battle of the Bulge, Hitler's last counteroffensive of the war. Although the battle was initially successful on the Germans part, the Axis powers were no match for American troops who eventually defeated the Germans in sub-zero temperatures.[19] Men like Bill are still remembered for their heroic actions during those

down on the first day of action, December 16, 1944.[21] He recalls the day his plane's engine caught on fire and flak, anti-aircraft fire, pelted into his body; he "started to look for places to belly- in, because you never bailed out of a P-47 if you could belly-in because you're apt to get killed real easy."[22] His injuries led him first to an Army Hospital in Paris; however, because he needed physical therapy for his right hand, he was transferred to a hospital in Bar-le-Duc.[23] It was at that Army Hospital in Bar-le-Duc where he was lucky enough to have Louise "Lou" Ablen as his physical therapist. It was late January of 1945 when the pair first met; ten months later they would be married.[24] After the war, Bill and Lou eventually met back in Bill's favorite place: that same ranch in Buffalo Creek, Colorado. The two married in their respective uniforms on November 22, 1945.[25]

Bill's heroic stretch in World War II was only the beginning of a lifelong career in the newly founded U.S Air Force. When asked how he felt about the official new branch of service Bill claims he and others "were sort of glad to be our own outfit."[26] Newlyweds Bill and Louise moved to Florida, where Bill was stationed at Eglin Field; they soon welcomed their first two children, Sally and Mitch.[27]

The year 1950 brought the start of the Korean War and Bill had elected to remain with the U.S Air Force, which meant he once again traveled halfway across the globe in the name of his country.[28] Bill completed 200 more missions in Korea, most of these missions of the low-level bombing sort, assisting with ground support operations.[29] Although he was once again injured by enemy fire, he kept up his service.[30] Bill's eyes were not spared from the horrors of war while in Korea, although he recalled that it was a much smaller war than World War II. During the Chinese offensive of 1951, he witnessed the destruction of an American division as the Chinese advanced and the Americans retreated, leaving "SOS stamped out in the snow" and "remains of tanks and equipment."[31] Bill witnessed a lot of destruction, but his unique perspective as a pilot led him to call Korea "beautiful and interesting from the air."[32]

He returned from Korea as a 31-year-old Major, welcomed by Lou and their children.[33] Their third child, Terri, would join the family in 1952. The years between the Korean and Vietnam wars were short lived, and while Bill and Lou spent those few years together with their growing children in Colorado, it was not long before he took off again with the Air Force.[34] He was in his late forties when he fought in his

Bill with one of his ground crew members at Alconbury Royal Air Force Base in 1965

[35] The Thuy Hoa Air Base was an Air Force base located on Vietnam's southern coast that existed from 1966-1970.[36] Like many other Americans of his time, Bill experienced a different type of combat in Vietnam. First, there were many restrictions on pilots, ones that Bill felt were unjust. Second, unlike World War II or Korea, he never saw what he was bombing, only the aftermath of "a bunch of leaves and some smoke."[37] Many people could never imagine dropping bombs and not knowing their impact — for someone like Bill Myers who took pride in his service to the United States, it must have been very difficult to not know the impact of those bombs, and furthermore, why he was dropping them in the first place. Speaking on the impact of the Vietnam War, Bill lamented the loss for the United States, saying it was not necessarily the brave soldiers who lost the war but "the politicians and citizens" adding that it "was a bad war."[38]Following his retirement from the Air Force in 1973, Bill was made a full Colonel at the age of 54.[39] Antsy to start their next adventure, Bill and Lou left their comfortable Colorado home for another faraway land: Saudi Arabia. It was at Dahran Royal Saudi Air Force Base where Bill worked for Northrup Aviation, an aviation consultation company.[40] Myers sang the praises of Saudi Arabia, noting "It was a land of swift justice, good food and beautiful beaches," and a great place for he and Lou to spend time before he fully retired.[41]

Their ten years spent in Saudi Arabia was just one of the many adventures the husband and wife shared together. That army hospital in Bar-le-Duc, France was simply a jumping off point for where their loving relationship of 61 years would take them. Together they had 3 children, 6 grandchildren, and 10 great-grandchildren.[42] His two oldest children, Sally (1946-2018) and Mitch (1949-1999) have since passed, but his youngest daughter Terri Myers Miller (1952) still lives in Colorado.[43]

Bill and other WWII veterans (not pictured) ride in a helicopter over Denver, taking part in an event of the Order of Daedalians, an organization that honors veteran aviators

It would have been easy for Bill Myers to hang up his hat and finish his time with the Air Force after his service in World War II, or even Korea, but Bill was not like others. He was dedicated to his country and loved aviation. The end of his career in the U.S Air Force saw Bill justly rewarded with many medals most people do not even dream of. After a grand total of 3 wars, 25 different airplanes, over 500 missions, Bill was the proud owner of five Distinguished Flying Crosses, the Legion of Merit, Bronze Star, Meritorious Service Medal, thirty-six Air Medals, the Croix de Guerre, the Belgian Fouragiere, and two Purple Hearts.[44]

Today, Bill is lovingly remembered by the friends and family he left behind. Grandson, 1st LT Dan Hingley, son of Bill's firstborn Sally, has even carried on his grandfather's legacy in the Air Force. Dan is a Government Flight Representative as well as a F-35

man" who "inspired [him] to join the Air Force to become a fighter pilot".[46] His grandson emphasizes that the World War II, Korea and Vietnam veteran "will be missed."[47]

Footnotes ↓

[1] William Frederico, "Bill E. Myers," (accessed July 8, 2020), p47pilots.com/P47-Pilots.cfmc=incP47BiographyHome.cfm&vm=BIO&pilotid=413&p=Bill%2BE.%2BMyers.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Aaron Rognstad, "Seasoned Veteran," Defense Visual Information Distribution Service, (accessed August 2, 2020), https://www.dvidshub.net/news/44579/seasoned-veteran.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid.

[11] "Historic Resources of Camp George West," History Colorado, (accessed August 2, 2020), https://www.historycolorado.org/historic-resources-camp-george-west.

[12] Aaron Rognstad, "Seasoned Veteran," Defense Visual Information Distribution Service, (accessed August 2, 2020), https://www.dvidshub.net/news/44579/seasoned-veteran.

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[19] "Battle of the Bulge," History.com, (accessed September 6, 2020), https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/battle-of-the-bulge.

[20] Ibid.

[21] "Col USAF (Ret) Bill E. Myers, 1919-2018," Order of the Daedalians 18th Flight, Mile High Flight 18," (accessed September 6, 2020,) appollo.daedalians.org/flights/29/last_flights.

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[28] "Col USAF (Ret) Bill E. Myers, 1919-2018," Order of the Daedalians 18th Flight, Mile High Flight 18," (accessed September 6, 2020), appollo.daedalians.org/flights/29/last_flights.

[29] Aaron Rognstad, "Seasoned Veteran," Defense Visual Information Distribution Service, (accessed August 2, 2020), https://www.dvidshub.net/news/44579/seasoned-veteran.

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[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Legacy, "Obituary for Bill Myers 1919 – 2018," Legacy.com, (accessed July 7, 2020), www.legacy.com/obituaries/denverpost/obituary.aspx?n=bill-e-myers&pid=190934300.

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[36] "Tuy Hoa Air Base," Wikipedia.org, Wikimedia Foundation, (accessed July 14, 2020), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tuy_Hoa_Air_Base.

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